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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the rising interest in the use of modules as a means of improving instruction for teachers of reading, and examines the pressures for innovation and the results of research efforts. Acknowledging that the teacher is the key component in determining whether children learn to read successfully, training institutions are accepting the challenge to provide the most effective instructional opportunities possible. Conventional teaching patterns are being replaced with innovative learning models. The use of modules as a vehicle for reading teacher training is proving successful in college and university classrooms. (Author)

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THE BACKGROUND OF EDUCATORS' INTEREST IN LEARNING MODULES: WHY MODULES?

Paper presented at the
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THE BACKGROUND OF EDUCATORS' INTEREST IN LEARNING MODULES: WHY MODULES?

Something has been happening in classrooms where reading teachers are prepared. Video lecture outlines have replaced notepads. Modules are purchased instead of texts. Lecture halls have been converted into resource centers. Passing a written final is no longer the key to a course grade.

Reading professors, and in some cases entire departments, have joined a reform movement (8) competency based or performance based teacher education (C/PBTE), a process which has been proposed as a means for improving educational personnel. Modules (11) have surfaced as one vehicle around which some C/PBTE programs have been organized. This, "movement has gained such momentum during the past few years that it has the potential for reshaping American education, particularly teacher education" (12).

What Caused the Change?

Many reasons have been reported for the changes in progress. Some explain that Austin's and Morrison's The Torch Lighters (3) and The First R (2) "rocked the boat". Others report that some educators will always go where the funding is. Another quips that someone opened the door and the behaviorists blew in. A more fruitful search for causative factors comes from examining (1) what C/PBTE has to offer the reading profession and (2) what encroaching social forces have demanded institutional change.

What Does C/PBTE Offer?

The concepts upon which C/PBTE is based seem reasonable. If the product of a university reading course is to be a teacher who can teach children to read, then the task is to analyze the performances of "good" teachers, state the actions observed in explicit terms, and then assist learners in attaining competency in those specific areas. The goal of a teacher training program in reading then becomes the production of students who have demonstrated that they can actually perform rather than students who have shown that they can only generate correct answers for exams.

Society Changes

Society is an evolutionary amoeba, constantly assimilating daily events and emerging ideologies. No problem exists when its traditional structures hold within themselves the capacity for adaptation. Dissonance is created, though, when concepts which have been generally accepted by the populace are not mirrored in their educational establishments. As the schism becomes more pronounced, pressure groups emerge clammoring for adjustments. "American education has entered the seventies confronted by pronounced crises.... Urgent reforms in teacher education programs are warranted" (6).

Five societal movements have emerged in recent years to fuel the reform fever: (1) the emergence of technology, (2) the pressure for accountability, (3) the desire for self actualization, (4) the rise of teacher protests, and (5) the production of the pill. Fed by these five flames, C/PBTE has emerged.

Emergence of technology. Less than thirty years ago television first appeared in American homes. A decade later both programmed learning and computer based instruction appeared in the public school (14). The

classroom teacher grew to expect improved materials. Projectors, tape recorders, and controlled readers are not uncommon instructional aids. Technology, the fruition of man's inventive nature, had expanded the possibilities for teaching and learning. Yet, in most university classrooms the instructor simply lectured on.

Pressure for accountability. Once the American public had accepted the belief that its knowledge and skills, as demonstrated by advanced technology, made it far superior to any other developed nation, it was primed for a devastating blow. When another nation "beat it" in a race to space, Americans felt a calamity had occurred. Those in charge of the space effort became accountable for results. A like accounting was demanded of other institutions, including the schools.

Thus, an "age of accountability" (13) was born. A presidential address informed the nation that "School administrators and school teachers alike are responsible for their performance, and it is in their interest as well as in the interests of their pupils that they be held accountable" (13). Children were to be measured to see how much "learning" had taken place. The results were to be made public, for "Schools in America serve and are accountable to the citizenry not the professionals" (13). The university professor was not immune to the demands for accountability.

Desire for self-actualization. In counter response to society's rapid assimilation of technology and accountability, a phenomen known as the human potential movement appeared. Basic tenents of this movement included the belief in a process of "becoming" (16), the need for security and acceptance, and the attainment of a positive self-image.

Schools were criticized as being work houses, dehumanized institutions run by the tick of the clock (18) rather than the tick of the heart. Students, it was said, had become objects rather than persons. The competition produced by a traditional grading system was denounced. The purpose of schools was the development of adequate people. Therefore, teachers were admonished to be "more concerned about the selves of children"(4).

Likewise, the teachers who were to help children reach their full potential were to be treated in like manner by their irstructors... the professors in university classrooms. Institutions which educated teachers were admonished to, "be more concerned about the personalities and selves of teachers in training" (4). Mary Austin pointed out that "the development of self-renewing teachers can be accomplished only by self-renewing educators" (1).

Teachers protest. When Flesch informed parents that their children could not read (10) and then it was loudly acclaimed that Ivan could (19), confidence in the capability of America's teachers diminished. Researchers, after peering into over a thousand classrooms, reported that the teaching of reading in the elementary school was, "mediocre at best" (2).

With nowhere to turn, an aggressive breed of teacher emerged. Organizations were formed to demand duty free lunches, smaller classes, and a voice in decision making. Strikes and collective bargaining agreements followed. Discontent was expressed with the inferiority of university course content and its theoretical emphasis (2). Refusing any longer to be blamed for the state of reading in America, school marms retorted, "...our nation's schools are full of really

good teachers who were not 'produced' by teacher training institutions, but became good teachers in the process of trial by fire in the classroom" (9).

The pill appears. For twenty-five years, the university had been pressed to supply an increasing number of teachers to meet the needs of a growing population (17). Suddenly, the birth rate lowered. It became evident that fewer teachers would soon be needed. That suspicision proved to be reality when new teacher positions dwindled from 78,000 in 1969 to 19,000 just two years later (5).

Adding to the surplus were the women teachers, in increasing numbers, who married but delayed beginning families and therefore continued to teach (17). Brave "libbers" fought to continue working into advanced stages of pregnancy, making still fewer positions available. With more applicants that positions, school systems could afford to be highly selective in their hiring practices. Competency could now be demanded.

The University Changes

These five societal changes did affect the university classroom. As technology advanced, the university professor expanded his lecture to include ways to appropriately use audio-visual methods. When the public pushed for accountability, students were taught to write behavioral objectives. When society pressed for recognition of the individual, the course bibliography was extended to include Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming (4). When teachers organized, the professor gave thanks that the rabble-rousers were in the field, having had the sense to wait until after the diploma to become militant. When graduates found no jobs, they were advised to upgrade their qualifications by taking more course work. But many felt these surface effects were less than adequate.

The Move Toward Reform

Late in 1967 the U. S. Office of Education requested proposals for ways to restructure teacher education programs. A handful of institutions were commissioned to produce theoretical models. A short time later a Commission on High Quality Teacher Education was formed by International Reading Association's President Donald Cleland (7). This commission was requested to suggest procedures to improve the instruction of reading teachers (7). At a symposium conducted by this group, Mary Austin reviewed the salient features of the ten Office of Education models (1). She concluded that among many features needing to be incorporated in a model for the preparation of reading personnel should be individualization of instruction, behavioral objectives, and instructional modules. Stanton and Sartain (17) voiced the Commission's agreement.

> There is no one perfect approach to teacher education. However, the Commission views the modular approach as the most promising at this time when the profession needs to move away from the conventional lecture course approach. . . .

So What is a Module?

Elam (8) defines a module as "...a set of learning activities (with objectives, prerequisites, pre-assessment, instructional activities, post-assessment, and remediation) intended to facilitate the student's acquisition and demonstration of a particular competency." Another compares a module to a map since the learner is pointed toward his destination (objective), some good routes for getting there are suggested (learning activities), and ways of judging whether or not he has arrived (pre- and post-tests) are provided (15). The learner may complete all or only part of the package's suggested learning

activities, receiving credit for any given module simply by demonstrating proficiency. A variety of modules are made available from which the student selects those components most appropriate for his personal curricular needs.

The Module Meets Societies' Demands

The Module Uses Technology

A module has the potential for incorporating technology's latest advances into the university reading curriculum. Students may be instructed to view a videotape of an experienced teacher using the Reading Miscue Inventory or view a slide/tape presentation of the reading experiences in a first grade class. They may complete an outline while listening to a taped lecture, or produce a cassette recording of their own teaching performance. They may engage in micro-teaching while being video-taped by a fellow student. Computerized Assisted Instruction may be utilized. The limits are defined only by the ingenuity of the module writers and availability of facilities.

The Module Provides Accountability

A modularized program answers many of the demands for accountability. The university professor may now report the exact competencies which his students have demonstrated. Those competencies are no longer dependent only upon what the student knows, but now include what he or she can do. The ambiguous language of generalized objectives is no longer acceptable (1).

The student gains from such accountability. He knows exactly what is expected, the conditions under which the behavior is

expected, and how he will be evaluated. In some modular programs he is also requested to assess each module's effectiveness, feeding back to the writers questions raised, areas inadequately covered, test items which seem invalid. He is held responsible for his own time schedule and for his own choice of course content. The student is required to share in the responsibility of becoming a proficient teacher of reading.

The Module Promotes Self-actualization

Self-actualization implies self-direction by the student in his own learning with more opportunities for choice, more active envolvement, and more individual responsibility for learning (4). The modularized program is the epitome of this type of individualization. The student may complete his program in eight weeks or sixteen. He chooses among alternatives when deciding how best to meet an objective. His interests, his abilities, and his experiences are the criteria for his personal course plan. The module provides a truly, "unprecedented humanization of teacher education" (1).

The Module Answers Teachers' Protests

The fact that teachers are voicing discontent with their preservice preparation is no threat to the professor using modularized instruction. The "mounting charges of irrelevance" (6) are no longer applicable. Content and process are equally present in the modules. For instance, not only is the student required to "know how" to record miscues on a worksheet, but is required to "show he can" by recording during a taped presentation. Knowledge is now immediately related to practice.

Since the planning for and the writing of modules are frequently the joint efforts of individuals from several disciplines: university

professors, students, personnel from local school districts, and occasionally a parent, if a group or individual wishes to "gripe" he is promptly asked to join in the work. Producing modules, keeping them up-to-date, rewriting using student suggestions, adding additional alternate learning strategies, eliminating ambiguities in test items--all answer the criticism that the professor has failed to respond to change and teacher needs.

The Module Provides a Partial Solution to the Problem of Fewer Jobs

With fewer positions now available, public school officials can be highly selective in their choices of teachers to employ. It is only logical to assume that they will be looking for those educators who have not only displayed adequate background knowledge for teaching but who have also demonstrated that they can perform competently. Furthermore, if competency is made the basis of contract renewal, it is highly probably that many more teaching spaces will become available to those providing proof of their capability. "The growing demand for self-regulation within the teaching profession..." (6) is now a clear possibility.

Conclusion

Almost fifteen years have passed since the first clarion cry roused the reading profession from its complacency. Its shrill tones brought forth response from like-minded teachers and administrators across the nation. Its strain was captured by elected officials. Diligent reformers within the profession toil to bring into harmony the old institutional forms and the new societal demands. "We have come a long way, but we have far to go"(2). The future is in the planning stages.

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